

FEB 3 1976

# MEMORANDUM

From Chief, CWS To Director, RPD Date 16 January 1976  
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Through: Director, EHE  
Our ref. CWS/EHE Subject: PROFESSOR LEDERBERG'S LETTER  
Your ref.

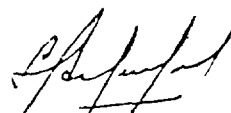
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We have read with interest, Professor Lederberg's letter to Dr Winfield, a copy of which was sent to us for information.

*Van Sittler*  
It is true that the CWS Unit had a negative attitude to the research proposal that Professor Lederberg was attempting to promote. We cannot get very excited about the sophisticated and long-term research which was proposed in order to determine, with exactitude, the mechanism that leads to the extinction of pathogens in the composting process. Current knowledge in the subject - albeit acquired empirically - is quite adequate for engineering purposes. Another point is that it was never really clear whether Professor Lederberg was advocating research on composting (aerobic) or digestion (anaerobic) - processes that involve entirely different mechanisms.

The negative attitude to the research proposals has been incorrectly attributed to other aspects of excreta disposal in which CWS has a continuing interest. It is true that there are difficult problems of sanitation in rural areas - not the least of which are the socio-cultural barriers to progress. We do feel that significant progress can only be achieved when rural people recognize that improved sanitation conditions leads to improved health and well-being and when rural people are motivated to make the personal efforts to achieve improved sanitation. Research on the mechanisms leading to the death of pathogens in the composting process will not overcome this problem.

The same socio-cultural barriers need to be overcome in order to have family groups defaecate in the same place - a desirable first step prior to any treatment process, composting or otherwise. It is simply impractical from any point of view to organize an excreta collection system which has to pick up isolated droppings in the bush, the fields or along the roads. Logic suggests therefore, that the first step is the encouragement of latrines or some other centralized facility for defaecation.

  
L.A. Orihuela